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# Further Education Lecturers: A Glimpse into Factors Influencing Their Career Satisfaction, Aspirations and Development

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## Abstract

There is no doubt that Further Education (FE) lecturers are one of the most influential individuals in the life of a young adult. Nevertheless, it is usually reported that they find their jobs stressful and irritating. Furthermore, reports have indicated most graduates do not find teaching in FE sectors as an exciting and interesting environment to begin their career. Thus, this sector is not viewed as one where job satisfaction and opportunities for career developments is derived. This paper provides a glimpse into some reported factors that influences FE lecturers' career satisfaction, aspirations and development. In particular, personal, organisational, external and political influences that impacts on FE lecturers are examined and a call for further research within this sector is strongly recommended.

**Keywords:** Further education lecturers; Career satisfaction; Career aspiration; career development; motivating factors; impeding factors.

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## Introduction

Further Education (FE) lecturers are the most diverse teaching professionals in the United Kingdom (UK). This is because they teach a wide age range of learners from 16 years and over. They also work across various settings such as colleges, sixth forms, adult and community education centres, Universities, voluntary and charity organisations, prisons and youth offender organisations and also carry out work-based learning (Prospect, 2018). There are two main career development paths for FE lecturers; this could be the teaching or management route (TES 2018). Lecturers who progress through the management route usually set aside their teaching role and most often have other relevant qualifications and experience to perform in those roles. Lecturers rising through the teaching route normally focus on the academic aspect of the job and carry out few managerial responsibilities and non-teaching roles.

There is no doubt that a FE lecturer is one of the most influential individuals in the life of a young adult. According to Hattie (2003) FE lecturers account for 30% of learners' achievement. Moreover, the role of a FE lecturer is very paramount. This is because of the diverse kind of learners encountered in FE environments ranging from individuals with positive experience of education with those without, as well as learners from diverse social, mental, educational, and economic background, thereby making teaching within this sector interesting and equally challenging (ET Foundation, 2014).

In spite of the variability and the importance of the lecturers to young adults, It is usually reported that FE lecturers find their jobs stressful and irritating (Kinman and Wray, 2014; FE jobs, 2018). Furthermore, the Education and Training Foundation (ET Foundation) in their 2014 document stated that most graduates do not find teaching in FE as an exciting and interesting sector to begin their career. Anecdotally, it is said that many teachers especially FE lecturers tend to leave the profession in the first three years of their teaching career. Thus, indicating that the FE sector is often not perceived as one where an individual derives job satisfaction and opportunities for career developments.

It is assumed that carrying out this research will help inform FE managers, policy makers and the government of the reasons many FE lecturer are quick to leave the profession and understand possible methods of addressing staff retention especially, new trainee teachers in the profession. Moreover, it will make individuals willing to be FE lecturers aware and better equipped to make the begin their career. This is because they will be knowledgeable about the opportunities available, challenges in the job and career progression route.

The intended outcome of this research is to examine the factors that influence FE lecturers' career satisfaction, aspirations and development. This will help shed more lights on the Positive and negative factors responsible for career satisfaction, aspirations and development amongst FE lecturers as well as organisational, external and political influences on FE lecturers. Ultimately, it will help formulate recommendations on the best approach to increase career satisfaction, aspirations and development of FE lecturers. After all, quality teachers and teaching are the keys to developing and maintaining the intelligence of informed citizens (Richardson and Watt, 2006).

## Literature review

### Historical background to the roles and responsibilities of FE lecturers

The FE sector is the education institution that has witnessed the most changes in the UK as a whole since the 1980s

(Belgutay, 2017). These reforms have affected all three main areas of FE education, which are: vocational training (including apprenticeships), academic teaching and core skills (Prospect, 2018). Following the post-war era, Post-16 educations expanded and Since the 1980s, FE lecturers took up a social inclusion role by carrying out pre-vocational, low level and selective vocational teaching and training for learners who are unable to access the academic route for progression (Hodgson and Spours, 2017).

In the 1990s, FE colleges became incorporated institutions, however, unlike the Universities there were not autonomous but relied on central government for funding (Simkins, 2000; Hodgson and Spours, 2017). It has been reported that in the last three decades, there have been 28 major legislations to FE sector and 48 secretaries of states (Belgutay, 2017). Yet, the FE sector has remained resilient with a workforce who regularly works in uncertain and eclectic conditions to ensure that learners achieve both their academic and personal goal.

However, this reliance on the central government has equally taken its toll on the FE lecturers, as the continuous changes in economic and education era has subsequently impacted on the FE sector, and FE lecturers have been said to struggle with Professional Identity (Hodgson and Spours, 2017). They are tasked with supplying skills to employers and equipping learners with knowledge for Higher education.

### Teaching in FE and HE sector

Although, there are few literatures that have explicitly stated any comparable difference between FE and HE sector teaching methods. There are some anecdotal evidences that teaching in FE and HE sector differs. Some studies have said that in comparison to HE sector, teaching in the FE sector is more student-centred, more experiential in nature, involving feedback questioning, and application of theoretical models (Turner, McKenzie and Stone, 2009; Greatbatch and Tate, 2018).

Perhaps it is because in FE environment teaching is aimed to support student in constructing meaning and understand how knowledge can be applied, while in HE, teaching is more aimed at making learners develop critical intelligence and questioning assumptions (Lea and Simmons, 2012). Moreover, FE college students' cohorts are smaller when compared with HE and FE teachers are tasked with developing personal and supportive relationship with learners (Turner, McKenzie and stone, 2009).

Interestingly, many FE colleges are now delivering HE courses (King and Widdowson, 2012; Lea and Simmons, 2012). This is referred to as HE in FE, with the students referred to as HE in FE students. HE in FE emerge with the introduction of foundation degrees in 2000, and it is hoped that colleges will widen participation of students in education by delivering courses to learners using a flexible mode of delivery with greater employer engagement (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] 2000).

It is believed that HE in FE students will draw from the teaching experiences of the FE lecturers to enhance their learning (King and Widdowson, 2012). It has been noted that these HE in FE students are mostly from non-traditional academic backgrounds and require additional academic support (King and Widdowson, 2012). This further reinforces the notion that teaching styles and methods differs between FE and HE lecturers.

This introduction of HE in FE have further changed the working practices of FE lecturers (HEFCE, 2000). It created more opportunities as FE lecturers can design courses in a supportive environment, participate in HE continuous development activities, and engage in scholarly activities and research (Turner, Mckeenzie and Stone, 2009). Equally, it created more challenges for FE lecturers as it made them take up more responsibilities because they have to ensure that the teaching styles, quality assurance protocols and assessment regimes aligns with both FE and HE sector (Turner, Mckeenzie and Stone, 2009).

Interestingly, anecdotal evidence indicates that many FE lecturers aspire to teach in HE environment and the introduction of FE in HE has further resulted in many FE lecturers fast moving into the HE sector. Perhaps, this is due to the idealised perception that unlike HE lecturers, FE lecturers have a low professional status (Gleeson, Davis, and Wheeler, 2005; Shain and Gleeson, 1999 in Turner, Mckeenzie and stone, 2009). This notion began as a result of the autonomy of FE being eroded from the constantly changing educational policies and agendas (Gleeson, Davis, and Wheeler, 2005; Shain and Gleeson, 1999 in Turner, Mckeenzie and stone, 2009) and this has since continued. Overall, this has further made it imperative to identify FE lecturers' career satisfaction, aspiration and development.

### Motivation for Teaching in FE sector

Generally, the FE sector is under-research (Lea and Simmons, 2012) and little has been published about career satisfaction, aspirations and development amongst FE lecturers. However, some motivation for teaching appears the same irrespective of the sector. A study by Eren and Tezel (2010) identified motivating factors such as economic, social, interpersonal, intellectual and ethical reasons as the reasons why an individual chooses the teaching profession.

Malderez et al (2007) stated that in many developed countries, like the UK, reasons why professionals remain in the FE sector can further be expatiated to include: desire to work with young adults, create time for family, social status, job security and many more. McKelvey and Andrew (1998) sum up the motivation for teaching in

FE as three main factors: individual attitude towards teaching; economic, policy and political influences; as well as individual and institutional factors. However, it is difficult to classify motivation into one category. As an economic, policy and political influence like higher pay might subsequently result in an individual developing a positive attitude towards teaching,

The Education and Training (ET) foundation (2014) expresses a similar notion stating that the motivation of current FE lecturers to stay in the profession includes: in-service training, diversity of learners, subject choice, the ethos of the sector, flexibility within the profession and career progression.

The FE sector is unique in that its teachers do not need to hold a teaching or degree qualification before commencing their career (ET foundation, 2014; National Career Service, 2018). Prior to 2007, there was no workforce qualification regulation for teaching in FE, an expert in a vocational or subject area could easily be employed. Since 2007, FE lectures are given a five-year window to obtain a teaching qualification (ET foundation, 2014). This explains why up till today, many employers set up their own entry requirement (National Career Service, 2018).

This in-service training offers progression opportunity for FE lecturers, allowing them to transit into teaching in the sector (ET Foundation, 2014). However, most teacher training qualification simply provides generic knowledge, leaving the new lecturer to rely on their own knowledge to contextualise their learning (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018). Usually, during this training, a trainee FE lecturer will have a mentor who is a subject expert; however, the quality of subject mentoring varies across each college (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018).

Many of the FE lecturers have identified their subject choice as a motivation of beginning and staying in teaching (ET foundation, 2014). It is said that subject choice is one of the greatest opportunities for attracting individuals into teaching, however, other factors such as reduction in funding from government, ensuring all learners achieve Maths and English at grade C, as well as challenges associated with teaching and assessment of learners also downplays the passion of FE lecturers to teach their subject choice (ET foundation, 2014).

More often, subject choice makes the FE lecturer passionate about their subject, making them enthused to meet the needs of learners by using innovative teaching and learning styles, thereby improving their confidence and ultimately satisfaction of being an FE lecturer (McKelvey and Andrew, 1998).

The diversity of learners within the FE sector is also a motivation for teaching in FE sector. As indicated earlier, learners in FE are diverse in terms of age, socioeconomic background, perceived attitude towards learning, prior education attainment and employment experience (ET foundation, 2014). It been noted that many FE lecturers are attracted to their role because they want to teach adults, and it is a good alternative to teaching in school or universities (ET foundation, 2014).

The flexible employment pattern is another attractive and unique feature of FE sector (ET foundation, 2014). For instance, some courses are offered in the evening and weekend, thereby making it possible for individuals to fit their teaching role alongside other work and family commitment. It is believed that most individuals will begin their career on casual or fractional contracts, then progress to full time employment, thereafter move up the ladder in the profession (College jobs, 2018)

### **Factors impeding career satisfaction, aspiration and development**

Generally, factors that impeded career satisfaction, aspiration and development mostly impact on the wellbeing and functioning of employees, leading to mental and physical ill health, work-life conflict, reduced motivation and commitment as well as impaired job performance (Schnall, Dobson, and Roskam, 2009).

According to the Kinman and Wray (2013) and (2014) seven factors greatly impact the FE lecturers. These factors are based on the Health and safety Executive management standards approach. They include:

**Demands:** This reflects the workload, pace of work and working hours (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). The flexible work pattern offered by FE sector could also be a potential drawback. This is because, most casual or fractional contract cannot be guaranteed to progress into a permanent role. This explains why it has been stated that working in FE doesn't offer job securities (McKelvey and Andrews, 1998).

**Control:** This encompasses levels of autonomy over working methods, pacing and timing (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). As indicated earlier, the level of autonomy of FE sector have been eroding over time. The process of marketisation and managerial control has further impacted on the working conditions of FE lecturers (Shain, 1999). For instance, learners are referred to as customers whom lecturers have to consider how their timing and pacing will satisfy them. All of these may contribute to extra workload for the lecturer.

**Peer Support:** This includes the degree of help and respect received from colleagues (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). Work colleagues are one of the main members of community of practice who can potentially increase or decrease an individual's level of career satisfaction, aspiration and development. This is supported by Bathmaker and Avis (2005) study where some new FE trainee lecturers felt marginalised from their colleagues at work, thereby impacting on their professional identities leading to career dissatisfaction.

**Managerial Support:** This describes the supportive behaviours from line managers and organisation itself; it encompasses the availability of feedback and encouragement (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). According to

Greatbatch and Tate (2018) FE workforce spends 15 hours or less per year on Continuous Professional Development (CPD). CPD are one of the means of developing professionally and personally (Association for teachers and Lecturers, 2015). It has been noted that when management and organisation prioritise CPD, employers are most likely to engage with it.

**Relationship:** This measures level of conflict within the workplace including bullying, behaviour and harassment (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). Little has been published about workplace conflict in teaching especially in FE sector. Nevertheless, what is known is that workplace conflicts generally have severe negative impact on the individual and organisation deterring development and productivity (Branch, Ramsay and Baker, 2013). Behaviour management of learners is another feature of FE student that many lecturers struggle with (Petty, 2014). Although, most learners in FE can be classed as adults, they still exhibit behavioural problems similar and sometimes even worse than children less than 16. This could be challenging to handle as a lecturer and further lead to job dissatisfaction.

**Role:** This assesses the levels of role clarity and the extent to which employees believe their work aligns with the organisations aims (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). A study by Locke, Fitzpatrick, and White (1983) noted that when lecturers perceive their role as being clear they tend to have more career satisfaction. This can be achieved by having feedback from colleagues and those in leadership to understand what is expected.

**Change:** These describe how organisational changes are managed and communicated (Kinman and Wray, 2013; 2014). As indicated earlier, the FE sector has undergone a number of reforms and this can affect FE lecturers' career satisfaction, aspiration and development. Moreover, if these changes are not managed and communicated well or introduced in a manner acceptable to FE lecturers, it could potentially impact on their career satisfaction.

### **Recommendation**

In general, there is an imperative to identify factors influencing FE lecturers' career satisfaction, aspiration and development. This is the reason we are proposing an action research methodology to conduct this research. According to Open University (2005, p4) action research is "any research into practice undertaken by those involved in that practice, with an aim to change and improve it". It is about taking action with research. Moreover, Action research eclecticism best suits this study as it allows the mixture of both qualitative and quantitative study, thereby allowing for richer details. Besides, the use of both data types allows for triangulation of data for various sources, this will further allow a robust research outcome. Thus, data will be gathered from FE lecturers as well as other staff in managerial and leadership position.

We are proposing that three main data collection methods be used for this study: interviews, focus group and questionnaires. The interview will be used to gather data from staffs that are in managerial or leadership position such as the principal, deputy principal, Directors, Board of directions and many more. Interviews will be useful in gathering open ended question that generate deep understanding of the research problem or phenomenon of interest (Gill *et al.*, 2008; Watson *et al.*, 2008). It will be used to explore their views on how to support lecturers' satisfaction, aspiration and development as well as identify those inhibitory factors.

Focus group will be used as the initial data gathering method for collecting Lecturers views of the motivating and inhibitory factors of lecturers' satisfaction, aspiration, and development. Focus group is a method use to explore a group of peoples view about a designated topic (Morgan 1998). According to Creswell (2013), focus group allowed data to be gathered in a timely fashion than the time required for conducting single one-to-one interviews.

The questionnaire will be used to gathering measurable data about motivating and inhibitory factors of lecturers' satisfaction, aspiration and development from a large sample of FE lecturers. The questions will be developed from the responses of the lecturers' focus group. However, questionnaires might not provide adequate insight into the research problem and there might be response bias and. as a result of limited options. This is reason, focus group will be conducted first, and a questionnaire developed from the responses of the participants. Also, participants will be given the opportunity for to leave a comment within the questionnaire.

### **Conclusion**

Researches about the FE sector are limited, moreover, research on the factors that influence career satisfaction, aspirations and development of Further Education lecturers are very limited. These factors are interwoven and needs to be explored in the context where the FE lecturers are currently employed.

not easily categorised into positive, negative, organisational, external and political influences because they are all interwoven. This explains why in the literature review, an overview of the motivating and impeding factors emerging in research was discussed.

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